



Overseas Security Advisory Council
Global Security News & Reports

Istanbul, Turkey: 2006 Crime and Safety Report

Crime and Safety

Europe - Turkey

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Istanbul is a city of approximately 13 million people spanning two continents. Unofficial population estimates range as high as 18 million. While the majority of crime in Istanbul is nonviolent in nature, there has been a marked increase in both the level of crime and aggressiveness of the criminals in recent years.

Most importantly, much of the crime is concentrated in areas frequented by tourists, as they remain the criminals' favorite target.

Visitors should be particularly vigilant in the Taksim square, Istiklal Caddesi, Sultanahmet and Grand Bazaar areas.

Traffic and the threat of accidents provide a daily challenge for anyone driving in Istanbul. Drivers routinely drive aggressively and ignore traffic regulations including red lights, stop signs and left turn rules. These and other traffic practices cause frequent accidents. Drivers should drive defensively and take every precaution while driving in the city.

Despite the many threats faced in Istanbul, one can safely visit or reside in the city by using common sense and good judgment.

Political Violence

The threat of terrorism in Istanbul from both transnational and indigenous groups remains high. While terrorists groups in Istanbul are numerous, organized and active, the Turkish National Police continues to be successful in combating (but not eliminating) the threat. Visitors to Istanbul should exercise caution and good judgment, maintain a low profile and remain vigilant.

In general, terrorist groups in Istanbul can be separated into three categories: Leftists, Kurdish separatists and Islamic radicals.

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Leftists include groups such as the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C, the former Dev sol) and MLKP (Marxist-Leninist Community Party). These groups are passionately anti-western and anti-American. While they have remained active over the past year, they have primarily targeted Turkish authorities and institutions. ATM machines and banks continue to be favorite targets of leftist groups. These groups should not be underestimated, and continue to pose a threat to Americans and American institutions. Over the years, leftist groups have been responsible for six different

attacks against the U.S. Consulate (the last in 1999) and have also targeted American businesses.

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Kurdish separatists make up the second category and have posed the greatest terrorist threat in Istanbul since suspending their self-imposed ceasefire in June of 2004. While there are some off-shoot groups, Kurdish separatists are primarily represented by the Kurdish worker's Party (AKA: PKK, KADEK and Kongra Gel). These subjects are anti-Turkish Government and have warned tourists to stay away. Their increasingly aggressive and indiscriminate attacks pose a significant threat to the population of Istanbul. It should be noted, however, that this group has never specifically targeted American citizens. The threat comes from the increasingly indiscriminate nature of their attacks.

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Radically pro-Islamic groups such as al-Qa'ida and IBDA-C (Great Eastern Islamic Raiders) make up the third category of terrorists and also pose a possible threat to Americans. The November 2003, truck bombings of two synagogues, the HSBC Bank and the British Consulate that killed dozens and wounded hundreds were masterminded and executed by such a group.

Taksim Square and Istiklal Caddesi, two areas frequented by tourists, are often the venue for demonstrations. Demonstrations are usually peaceful, but like those during the NATO summit in June 2004, they can turn violent.

Post Specific Concerns

Earthquakes:

The city of Istanbul sits on the North Anatolian fault line and is very susceptible to earthquakes. In August 1999, a massive 7.2 earthquake occurred 60 miles east of Istanbul. The resulting impact that it had on the city highlighted the vulnerability of Istanbul and its structures. Most buildings in the city do not comply with western earthquake standards and would likely sustain heavy

damage in the event of a significant quake. The private sector is encouraged to consider this threat when identifying property to occupy. For further information refer to the Mission's Earthquake preparedness Guide at <http://istanbul.usconsulate.com>.

Avian Influenza:

The World Health Organization (WHO) and Turkish authorities have confirmed human cases of the H5N1 strain of avian influenza, commonly known as "bird flu," in Turkey. Travelers to Turkey and other countries affected by the virus are cautioned to avoid visiting poultry farms, contact with animals in live food markets, and touching any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with feces from poultry or other animals.

In addition, the CDC and WHO recommend eating only fully-cooked poultry and eggs. For the most current information and links on avian influenza in Turkey, see the [State Department's Avian Influenza Fact Sheet](#) or visit the website of [U.S. Embassy Ankara](#).

Police Response

If you become a victim of a crime, immediately contact the police and the American Consulate. Most police do not speak English and the consulate can provide translation assistance on a twenty-four hour basis. In the event you are arrested or detained by the authorities in Istanbul, immediately contact the consulate at 212-335-9000 (press 0 for the 24-hour operator).

Medical Emergencies

112 is the countrywide number for emergency medical service. Most emergency room physicians in Istanbul speak English.

Hospitals and Doctors:

Amerikan Bristol Hastanesi (American Bristol Hospital)

Guzelbahce sokak, 80200 Nisantasi

Telephone: 212-311-2000

Fax: 234-1432

Point of Contact:

Medical Director, Dr. Engine Buzmanoglu

Cell: 0542-213-3980

The American Hospital in Istanbul is a full service hospital. Their emergency care unit is equipped to deal with most medical needs. They have capabilities up to trauma level 3 and have 135 hospital beds.

Alman Hastanesi (German Hospital)

siraselviler Caddesi No: 119

80060 Taksim

Telephone: 0212-293-2150

International Hospital of Istanbul

Istanbul Caddesi, NO: 82

34800 Yesilkoy

Telephone: 0212- 574-7802

Memorial Hospital

Piyale Pasa Bulvari

34385 Okmeydani

Telephone: 0121-210-6666

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Tourists continue to be a favorite target of criminals in Istanbul. Using good judgment and common sense will go a long way in

helping ensure you do not become a victim of crime. One should be particularly cautious while visiting tourist areas such as Istiklal Street, Taksim Square, Sultanahmet, Galatsaray Bridge and the Grand Bazaar.

Registration:

Americans living or traveling in Turkey are encouraged to register with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate through the State Department's travel registration website, <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/home.asp> Americans without internet access may register directly with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. By registering, American citizens make it easier for the Embassy or Consulate to contact them in case of emergency.

Remain Alert:

Pickpocketing in the tourist areas is increasingly common. Be aware of your surroundings and be on the look out for the common tactics used by criminals in Istanbul. One such tactic involves a diversion, such as a fistfight or argument. As the victim directs his or her attention to the staged event, another subject approaches from behind and steals a wallet or purse. If you witness such an event protect your property and quickly evacuate the area.

Men should keep their wallet and cash in their front pockets, and carry only a limited amount of cash placed in various locations on their person. Women should keep their purses closed shut and close to their body. Keep a photocopy of your passport with you and keep the original in your hotel, preferably in a safe deposit box.

Avoid speaking with strangers on the street. Oftentimes this conversation is a prelude to a criminal act. A common scam in Istanbul involves the victim being approached by an individual on the street who tries to engage him in conversation. There are several directions this scenario can take. Often the suspect will invite the unsuspecting visitor to a bar or cafe.

In the past, the suspect has drugged the victim through food or drink and robbed him after helping him back to his hotel or to a cab. Another scenario results in the suspect taking the victim to a bar advertising adult entertainment. The victim, is soon thereafter,

served with a exorbitant bar tab, often in excess of \$1000. If he refuses to pay, he is threatened with violence and is held until he pays the bill or a significant portion of it. Travelers can avoid these scams by exercising caution and good judgment when approached by strangers. Such scams are common in the Taksim Square and Istiklal Caddesi area. Police have been ineffective in combating these crimes.

Vehicle Burglaries:

A recent crime trend involves thieves breaking the passenger window of vehicles stopped in traffic or at controlled intersections and stealing valuables that are on the seat. Do not leave valuables in your automobile in plain view of pedestrians.

Public Transportation:

Particular caution should be used while using public transportation. Trams are a favorite location for pickpockets to operate. With people standing in close proximity to one another, public transportation is a perfect location for criminals to operate.

Taxis:

Another new crime trend involves the theft of luggage from subjects that have just arrived. The scenario targets people that are returning to their residence from the airport in a cab. As the victim returns home he or she is approached by a number of young people (the groups have been described as being both male and female and ranging in age). The youngsters offer to help the subject with their luggage and subsequently abscond with some piece of it. Police authorities suspect that the cab drivers may be involved in the scam.

Overcharging by taxis cab drivers has also become an increasingly common practice, particularly those parked near popular tourist areas such as the covered bazaars and the Sultanahmet district. Practice good security by automatically recording the license or number of any taxi you enter. Any improper actions on the part of a taxi driver can be reported to the Tourist police or by contacting

the Istanbul Chamber of Commercial Drivers (Istanbul Sofoler Esnaf Odasi, Ibrahim Karaoglanoglu Caddesi, No. 3 Oto Sanayi Seyrantepe, Istanbul, telephone 0212-283-6542 or fax 0212-283-6542.)

For Further Information

U.S. Consulate General Istanbul stands ready to assist American citizens and organizations in Istanbul. The Istanbul Country Council is active and meets regularly. Visit the council online at <http://istanbul.osac.gov>. U.S. Consulate General Istanbul is located at Kaplicalar Mevkii Sok. NO: 2, Istinye, maintains a bi-lingual presence twenty-four hours a day. The main number is: 90-212-335-9000 (0).

This is a U.S. Government inter-agency Web site managed by the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State

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